ONTARIO HERITAGE TRUST

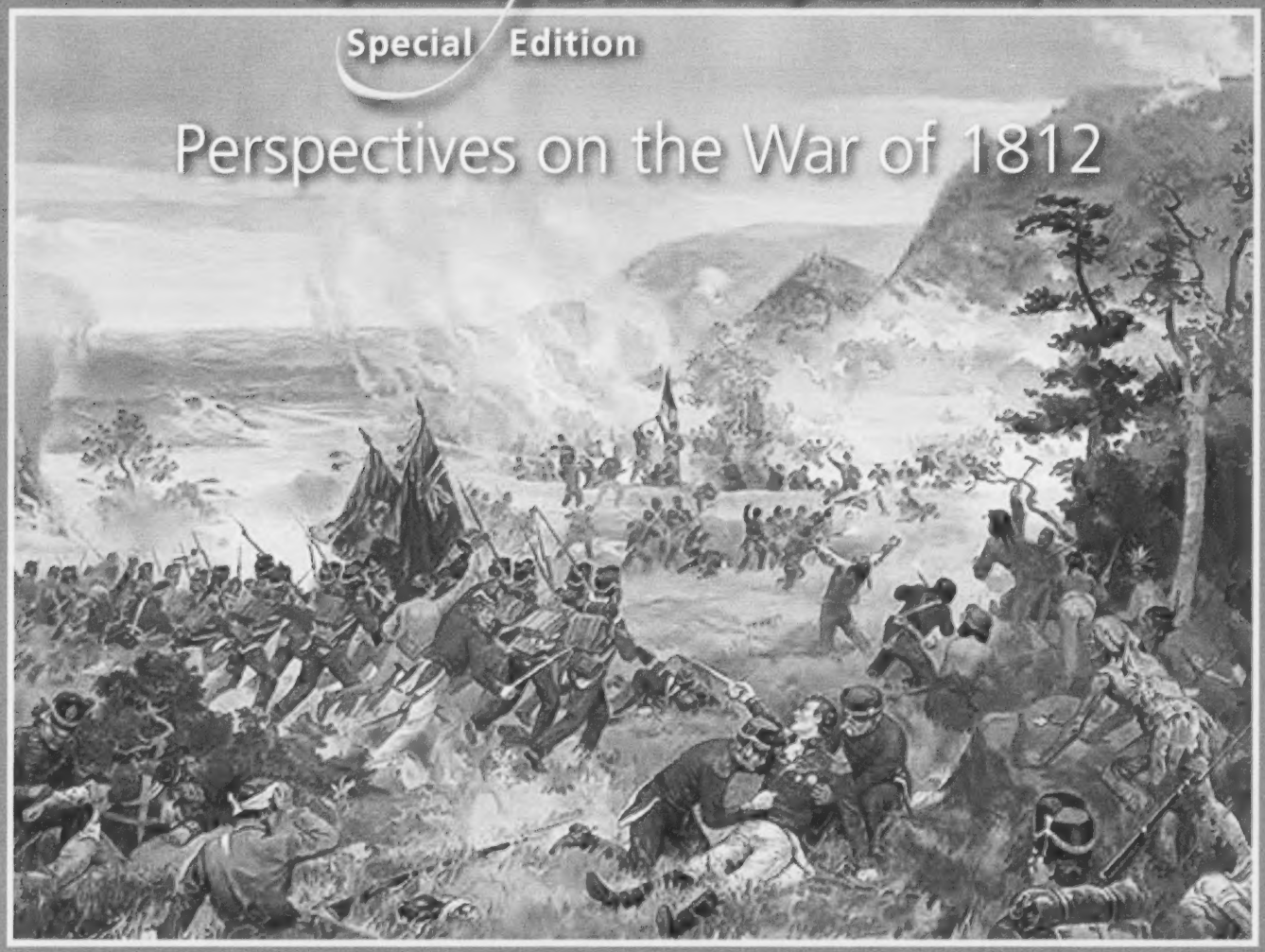
BRINGING OUR STORY TO LIFE

# Heritage Matters

A publication of the Ontario Heritage Trust February 2012

Special Edition

## Perspectives on the War of 1812



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Finding our place | Postcards from the battlefield
The heritage of Ontario's forts | Forgotten by her country

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## Feature story

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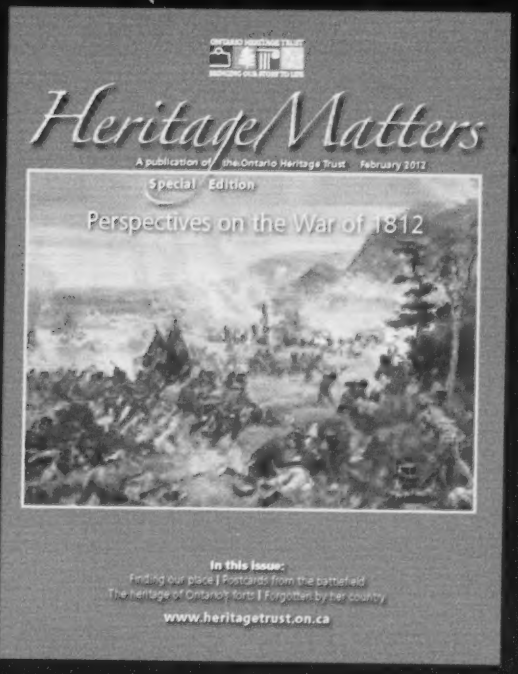
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Ontario


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**Cover image:** Battle of Queenston Heights, 13 October 1812 (Death of Brock), by John David Kelly, 1896. Library and Archives Canada, 1954-153-1.


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## A message from the Chairman

The War of 1812 is the most traumatic event in the history of Ontario. Put simply, the province was attacked and invaded. It resisted and, indeed, successfully expelled the invaders, but not before the capital city was captured and burned.

In various ways, this fierce struggle, with its remarkable outcome, shaped the province and its fundamental values in its critical formative years. The war brought together disparate elements of the province's small population in defence of its territory and institutions. Native peoples, United Empire Loyalists, French-speaking inhabitants, companies from the Black community and many other settlers fought alongside British regulars, achieving a remarkable degree of success against a much larger opponent. The struggle confirmed the posture of Ontario, embodied in the motto of the province:

Ut incepit Fidelis sic permanet
Loyal She Began, Loyal She Remains

While much of the fighting – and a good deal of the fiercest fighting – took place in or in relationship to Upper Canada, the War of 1812 was, of course, not confined to this province or, indeed, to North America. It was but part of a wider struggle between the United States and the British Empire that was fought both on land and on the high seas and the shores from the North Atlantic to the Gulf of Mexico. Moreover, it was fought while Britain was already engaged in a life-and-death struggle with Napoleon and his allies and satellites in Europe.

Quebec and Atlantic Canada were also directly affected and involved in the struggle with the United States. In fact, the war pushed all the British North American colonies closer together, reminding them of common interests and much-shared heritage, and laid the seeds for a confederation to come. The outcome also preserved for that confederation its great option to move west and north, in due course.

There may be debate as to who won the War of 1812. But for the British North Americans, the answer is clear. Had there been a different outcome, as desired by the invaders, there would be no Canada today. The successful defence of this province was the cornerstone in the struggle for a yet-unborn nation to survive.

So this bicentenary should be a time of celebration for Canadians; there is much for both Canada and the United States to celebrate together. In particular, the gradual emergence of a state of permanent peace between our two countries – arising from the steady growth of the view that discourse and negotiation is the correct and only way for two such neighbours to resolve differences – is ample cause to rejoice. There is also much for both countries to think about in their present and future relationships.

Tom Symons

**Thomas H.B. Symons, CC, O.Ont., FRSC, LLD**

The Upper Canada Preserved medal was intended to honour those who had distinquished themselves in the defense of Upper Canada during the War of 1812. The medals were ordered by the Loyal and Patriotic Society during the war and were struck in England. On one side, the medal depicts a laurel wreath with the words, "Presented by a grateful country for merit." On the other side is a depiction of the Niagara River flanked by symbols of the United States (an eagle), Britain (a lion) and Canada (an industrious beaver), framed by the words "Upper Canada Preserved." The medals were never awarded. After decades of controversy regarding who should receive them, all but three of the medals were destroyed in 1840.

# Perspectives on the

## A British perspective

By the Honourable David C. Onley

The Honourable David C. Onley, Lieutenant Governor of Ontario (Photo: Philippe Landreville, 2007)

2012 promises to be an extraordinary year for all Canadians. We will mark both the bicentennial of the War of 1812 and the Diamond Jubilee of Her Majesty The Queen. These two events highlight the core values that have defined us as a people.

Two hundred years ago, we took up arms to ensure that we would be governed according to British parliamentary, not republican, concepts. Two centuries later, our former foe is a strong ally. As a fully independent nation, we celebrate the 60th year of our sovereign's reign.

Canadian history has witnessed the search for common virtues among distinct peoples. While we have often disagreed, Canadians have always been prompt to defend our shared values in the face of threats from near and far. All the while, the Crown has played an integral role in safeguarding our democratic process.

The response by Canadians to the American challenge of 1812 showed that Aboriginals, francophones and anglophones would defend those common values and loyalties to the Crown. While Confederation would not occur for another 55 years, the unique Canadian sense of duty and love for this land had already been born in battle and through bloodshed. What we have become today was begun long ago.

As Lieutenant Governor, I have witnessed firsthand that sense of duty right across our diverse province. It is a great privilege to recognize countless volunteers whose time and dedication to our communities make for a quality of life second to none.

Our deeply ingrained values, nurtured through the centuries, allow for more than just the promotion of tolerance, but also for the understanding and acceptance of difference. This spirit yields immediate benefits to us all and is of increasing relevance in an ever-more-diverse and interconnected world.

When the War of 1812 ended, no territory had changed hands and no government was overthrown. For Canadians, the results would set in motion the path to nationhood. We would remain loyal to the Crown, yet become a truly independent nation.

Today, we pursue our own role on the world stage, while at the same time, as a proud member of the Commonwealth of Nations, we celebrate our monarch's 60th anniversary.

Equally, during this bicentennial year, we celebrate that the Canadian-American border – the longest in the world – remains demilitarized. It is an example to the world that old enemies can become fast friends and that differences can be resolved peacefully.

*The Honourable David C. Onley is Ontario's 28th Lieutenant Governor and a keen supporter of the province's heritage.*

# War of 1812

## An American perspective

By Martin O'Malley

Martin O'Malley, Governor of Maryland

The vote by the American Congress to declare war against Great Britain in 1812 was its closest war vote ever. Maryland's representatives – and Marylanders in general – were just as divided.

Sea trade-dependent Marylanders perhaps felt more than most Americans the sting of one of the war's precipitating causes – the impressment of American sailors by the Royal Navy – more than 10,000 by the start of the war. Two Marylanders were notoriously impressed in 1807 from the USS Chesapeake – the memories of which simmered throughout the war and became that generation's Boston Massacre.

Once war was declared, Maryland witnessed its first fatality in July 1812 during the Baltimore riots between pro- and anti-war factions. Passions ran high in Maryland and the Chesapeake area throughout the war.

Although fighting between Americans and the British did not begin in the Chesapeake until spring 1813, Maryland became the stage for more military actions than any other state during the next 18 months in a period that has been called "Terror on the Chesapeake." The improbably successful defence against the British Army and Navy at Baltimore in September 1814 – just two and a half weeks after the burning of the President's House and Capitol – was pivotal in bringing an end to the war. The defence of Baltimore was comprised largely of militia – citizen soldiers – and consisted largely of non-American-born and free and enslaved African-Americans.

The Battle of Baltimore gave America two of its most important icons – the Star-Spangled Banner flag (today, the most sought-out object in the National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C.) and its anthem. It also contributed to a new sense of American identity in the process.

War left Maryland devastated. It is estimated that 4,000 enslaved individuals and their families – important human capital in the state's economy – left with the British for settlement in Nova Scotia, Trinidad and elsewhere. Those resettled communities survive today in places like Halifax. The southern Maryland region especially was left burned and devastated, not to recover until the 20th century. Rich Baltimore merchants had sunk their merchant fleet to protect the harbor. But the inspiration taken from the successful defence against the British – from the instant of "the dawn's early light" – gave rise to a collective and immediate impulse to commemorate those events that have lived on through two centuries. Defenders Day is Maryland's oldest holiday.

Reasonable people will debate for centuries to come the causes and outcomes of the War of 1812. Perspectives will vary by region and nation – but ultimately our shared passion about the War of 1812 is about our love of place, the celebration of unity in our diversity and survival in the face of adversity.

*Martin O'Malley is the Governor of Maryland.*

## A First Nations perspective

By Harvey McCue

**What was the role of First Nations?** First Nations served as strategic and vital allies, more so in support of the British than the Americans. Britain desperately needed the additional resources offered by the First Nations as both defenders and combatants. Both sides acknowledged the effectiveness of First Nations' military strategies and First Nations warriors earned the distinction of fierce combatants as a result of their resistance to aggressive encroachment on their traditional lands.

**Who were the participating First Nations?** Numerous First Nations contributed to the war on both sides. For Britain, the most celebrated participants included Tecumseh, a significant leader of the Shawnee nation, and his half-brother, the Prophet, Tenskwatawa. They forged a temporary confederacy of First Nation warriors from the Wyandot, Pottawatomie, Ojibway, Ottawa (Odawa), Creek, Winnebago and Kickapoo nations, and their own Shawnee supporters.

The Iroquois confederacy (the Six Nations) were initially neutral, but eventually entered the war supporting both sides. They included warriors from the Grand River under John Norton and John Brant and the Bay of Quinte as well as members from St. Regis, and Kahnawake and Kanesetake in Lower Canada.

Mississauga and Ojibway warriors from lakes Simcoe, Couchiching, Muskoka and Rice led by Yellowhead, Snake, Assaince and Mesquakie defended Fort York and fought alongside warriors led by Odawa and Ojibway leaders, Assiginack and Shingwaukonse.

Supporters of the American military included warriors from the Choctaw and Creek nations. Six Nation warriors from the Seneca, Onondaga, Oneida and Tuscarora nations, many residing on the Alleghany, Cattaraugus, and Cornplanter reservations in present-day New York, allied with the Americans.

**Why did they fight?** For Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa, the war offered another opportunity to defend their traditional lands in present-day Illinois, Indiana, Ohio and Michigan from increasing American encroachment, a campaign begun in earnest in 1763 under the Odawa leader Pontiac and carried on in 1791 by Tecumseh's predecessor, the Shawnee leader, Blue Jacket and his Miami ally, Michikinikwa.

In reality, Tecumseh's 1812 confederacy was the last gasp for First Nations in North America to protect a vast traditional territory unencumbered by a foreign presence.

For the British-leaning Iroquois, the War of 1812 enabled them to retaliate for the American razing of their communities in New York – a campaign that began in 1779 and continued after the American War of Independence. It also renewed their allegiance to the British crown, an allegiance with roots in the Seven Years War and the Proclamation of 1763.

For the Mississauga, Ojibway and Odawa warriors and leaders, such as Assiginack (Blackbird) and Shigwaukonse (Little Pine) of Upper Canada, their war effort fulfilled their loyalty to the Crown.

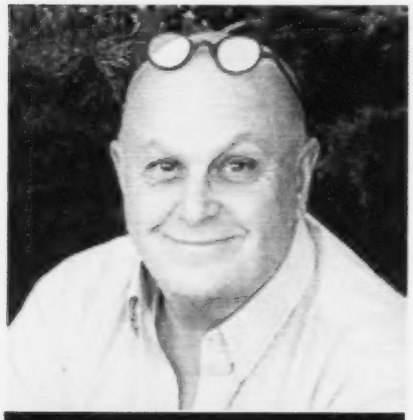
Without First Nations support in many key conflicts during the war, Ontario would not exist today. First Nation leaders and warriors fought decisive battles at Queenston Heights, Beaver Dams, Stoney Creek and the retaking of Fort George.

*Waubageshig (Harvey McCue) is a Board member for the Ontario Heritage Trust and a member of the Georgina Island First Nation, Lake Simcoe.*

Harvey McCue

## A Canadian perspective

By Charles Pachter



Charles Pachter

> After spending the summer of 2011 at my Lake Simcoe studio reading various histories about the War of 1812, I completed a series of paintings called Dressed to Kill (see www.cpachter.com/?page_id=23).

Commemorating military anniversaries – in this case a war that took place 200 years ago – can be problematic. Faded memories and revisionist histories often gloss over the grim realities of long-past conflicts.

The War of 1812-15 can be seen as the American Revolutionary War, Part Two. This round focused on the plucky new American nation of 18 states looking to expand into British colonial and Native-held territories. Many people thought the defeat of Britain would be easy, given that they were distracted by war in Europe. At the time, the British Canadian colonies of Upper and Lower Canada, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick had perhaps 75,000 inhabitants, compared to the burgeoning American population of 8 million.

But victory was not as easy as some thought. The war, fought mainly on now-Canadian soil, was full of grim and grisly reality. You wouldn't think that if you went by how today's battle re-enactors portray soldiers from 200 years ago. At any given historic site, most of the emphasis is on crisp uniforms, polished rifles and boots, immaculate white triangular tents – more on what they wore than on the suffering and horrors of battle.

The suffering and horrors were real. Soldiers were as likely to succumb to sickness and disease as to battle wounds. Amid the mosquitoes and malaria, the battles were punctuated by blundering, plundering, pilfering and pillaging, as well as scalping and eviscerating, and the amputation of limbs. Not to mention simple starvation. From the pioneer settler's perspective, the atrocities of war included the destruction of private property, stealing of livestock, burning of barns and homes, pilfering of grain, vegetables and clothing.

When it was all over, not one inch of territory got exchanged. Two emerging nations – white tribal cousins, many former compatriots, attacking and defending – killed one another for power and turf. The real losers, of course, were the First Nations peoples.

Once the British victory over Napoleon occurred, thousands of seasoned soldiers arrived in the British North American colonies. Who knows how differently things might have turned out if the defeat of Napoleon hadn't happened? Would Upper Canada, now Ontario, have become a huge American state?

Much will be made in the coming months of this conflict that finally put an end to the fighting between two restive neighbouring nations in the making. And, lest we forget, the senseless sacrifices of so many led eventually to the peaceful co-existence that we now take for granted between our two great democracies in the 21st century. May that peace continue.

*Charles Pachter is a painter, printmaker, sculptor, designer, historian and lecturer. His work is represented in public and private collections around the world.*

# Fighting for freedom

By Wayne Kelly

The "Colored Corps" provincial plaque unveiling (1994)

What must Richard Pierpoint have thought in 1812 when he heard the war drums beating again? Abducted from Senegal at the age of 16, Pierpoint was brought to America where a British officer purchased him as a slave. During the American Revolution, he fought for the British side in Butler's Rangers. Later, he came to Upper Canada – a freed man to settle a military land grant. In 1794, with other Black veterans, he unsuccessfully asked the government for land so that a separate Black settlement could be formed.

By 1812, Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe's act to limit slavery had made Upper Canada a safe haven for freedom seekers and escaped slaves from the United States. When the United States declared war against Britain in 1812, Blacks living in Canada rallied to the flag to defend their new homeland and liberty.

Pierpoint offered "to raise a Corps of Men of Color on the Niagara frontier." The army refused his offer but named white officer Captain Robert Runchey to command a segregated Coloured Company. The small company was garrisoned at Fort George and fought in key battles at Queenston Heights, Fort George and Stoney Creek. During the battle of Fort George, Captain Fowler – who, by that time, commanded the Coloured Company – wrote that the "Black Corps (as part of the British forces) . . . advanced to repel the foe, notwithstanding the showers of grape and other shot from his vessels brought to this point . . . The contest was severe and . . . The officers and men of the above mentioned corps fast fell and the contest soon became unequal . . . "

That bloody campaign turned the Americans back from taking Canada, marking the beginning of the war's end. But the Coloured Company continued on for the duration – constructing and maintaining military posts, fortifications and transportation routes – tedious and laborious work unpopular with soldiers.

During the War of 1812, Blacks played an important role in defending Upper Canada. They fought in key battles, faced hardships and achieved much. After the war, the soldiers who had fought so hard returned to civilian life. But things were not easy for them. The soldiers had been promised six months disbandment pay but Sergeant Thompson of the Coloured Company was told "he must go and look for it himself." When Black veterans went to claim their land grants, they found that the land was smaller and more remotely located than grants being given to white veterans. In the end, few veterans could settle their grants. Pierpoint, destitute by 1821, asked the authorities for help: "now old and without property ... he finds it difficult to obtain a livelihood by his labor; that he is above all things desirous to return to his native country". Pierpoint, whose life was so punctuated by war, never did get to go home.

*Wayne Kelly is the Manager of Public Education and Community Development at the Ontario Heritage Trust.*

# Finding our place

By Stephen Smith

Meeting of Brock and Tecumseh, 1812, by C.W. Jeffreys, 1869-1951. Library and Archives Canada, 1972-26-1360.

American president James Madison signed the declaration of war in Washington on June 18, 1812 that began the War of 1812. Conquering Canada, Thomas Jefferson famously said, would be "a mere matter of marching."

"We shall drive the British from our continent," an eager Congressman declared; Canadians would be received "as adopted brethren."

It took a while before couriers could carry word of the war to the wider world. Almost a week passed before the news arrived in Quebec, and it took more than a month to reach the enemy's capital in London, England. In fact, nobody told the American garrison watching over the strategic strait of Michilimackinac, where Lake Huron meets Lake Michigan – which is how a small furtive force of British regulars (supported by Sioux and Chippewa warriors) were able to seize the fort without firing a shot.

Two hundred years later, as we observe the war's bicentennial, it can seem sometimes as though delayed communication remains one of the chief legacies defining a conflict that bloodied the eastern half of the continent all those years ago.

What was it all about, anyway? Did we win or didn't we? For such a formative phase in our history, the War of 1812 remains simply, for many of us, the surprising story of an unlikely victory over a bullying neighbour, the overthrow of a mighty military and economic power by plucky bands of farmers allied with a few British redcoats and their native allies. Beyond that, we can conjure a vague association of brave deeds by people named Brock, Tecumseh and Secord at places called Queenston Heights, Beaver Dams and Crysler's Farm. As Canadians, we like to take credit for making the United States' president's house white. And without us, what would they do for a national anthem?

Of course, it's a little more complicated than that.

In the months ahead, there will be much anniversary marching, accompanied by the beat of period drums and volleys from the muskets of earnest re-enactors. Nothing wrong with that. But we should balance the entertainment with a focus on the finer weave of what happened all those years ago, and challenge ourselves to think about and debate what those events really meant to the future of our fledgling nation.

Like all wars, this one was bloody and brutal, sowing fear and misery. For some, the War of 1812's most important lessons might be in what it failed to achieve for the First Nations involved, and the dashed hopes and broken promises left scattered around once the peace was restored in 1814. It's as easy to celebrate battles and bravery as it is to tailor the past to fit modern-day agendas. We shouldn't be satisfied leaving it at that.

*Stephen Smith is a Toronto journalist. He writes about hockey history and culture at puckstruck.com.*

# Postcards from the battlefield

By Jim Hill

Chippawa monument (Photo courtesy of The Niagara Parks Commission)

Old Fort Erie (Photo courtesy of The Niagara Parks Commission)

The War of 1812 touched the Niagara area like no other region in North America. Fighting started along the Niagara River in the summer of 1812 with pot shots across the river and it continued until the end of 1814 with epic battles and siege warfare. The devastation was near complete. Virtually every town and military post along the Niagara River was destroyed in the fighting. Following the war, people returned and began rebuilding, but the war was followed by a worldwide economic depression that slowed progress. The War of 1812 was something most people wanted to put behind them.

But with the increase in visitors to Niagara Falls and the return of veterans, there was renewed interest in the battlefields and forts of Niagara. Brock's Monument (or more correctly, Brock's monuments – the first having been destroyed by a bomb and the second opened in 1859) stood out as the official recognition of the sacrifice of 1812. Once the railroad and canals were well established, tourism to the area flourished. Hackney cabs would offer a trip to the battlefields and visitors could scale a tower for a better view of the battlefield of Lundy's Lane. Pieces of the old forts were taken as souvenirs, or to improve a nearby rock garden. Towns and cities began to encroach on these important places.

Eventually, historians like Ernest Cruikshank began writing seriously about events in Niagara during the war and brought to light the original correspondence of those in the thick of the fighting. Historical societies began to muster their forces to save the sites. Many of the best defenders were women's groups who were also fighting their own battles to secure the vote and rights for women.

By the beginning of the 20th century, it was clear that Canadians would commemorate the centennial of the War of 1812. Monuments, parades and celebrations were planned for visitors coming from both sides of the border. At the same time, the newly established provincial agency, The Niagara Parks Commission (NPC), began to acquire more property, much of it related to the war. In some cases, it was purchased or even donated; other Crown lands were simply turned over to the Commission. Queenston Heights, Fort George, Fort Erie, Lundy's Lane and eventually Stoney Creek would be cared for by the NPC.

In the 1930s, projects were launched to restore the ruins of 1812, including Fort Erie and Fort George. This work was carried out to bring Canadian history back to life. As Ron Way, the young historian tasked with designing the reconstructions would put it later, "these constitute a very real aid in transmitting to many thousands of persons a true sense of history . . . " The projects also provided work for those caught up in the Great Depression. Old Fort Erie opened to the public on Dominion Day, July 1, 1939. Two months later, another war would overshadow the celebrations and delay the opening of Fort George.

Over the years, other communities and levels of government have taken on the preservation and interpretation of some of these sites – for example, Fort George by Parks Canada and Battlefield House at Stoney Creek by the City of Hamilton. More recently, the NPC acquired the Laura Secord Homestead and the Chippawa Battlefield. In the past year, infrastructure and visitor facilities at the sites have been updated in an effort to prepare for the bicentennial of the War of 1812. Visitors can travel lake to lake along the beautiful Niagara Parkway and follow a timeline of the war that begins in Niagara-on-the-Lake and ends in Fort Erie. This is the story of the dramatic events of 1812 with personalities that range from heroic Canadian pioneer women, to gallant British Generals, to courageous Mohawk warriors.

Events are planned throughout 2012-2014 and information is available at discover1812.com. A hint for those planning their travels in the coming years: most of the commemorations will take place on, or very close to, the historic dates (many will conveniently fall on a Saturday).

Join us in Niagara over the coming years to commemorate the battles that were fought to defend Upper Canada and to celebrate the enduring peace that both sides won. Those who visit these special places will be carrying on a tradition that reaches back to the war itself.

*Jim Hill is the Superintendent of Heritage with The Niagara Parks Commission.*

Laura Secord monument, Queenston Park (Photo courtesy of The Niagara Parks Commission)

# Keeping the peace: Quakers and the War of 1812 in Upper Canada

By Robynne Rogers Healey

The Friends (Quaker) Meeting House and Cemetery on Yonge Street in Newmarket.
Photo: Doors Open Newmarket

Despite the fact that the War of 1812 came literally to the doorsteps of members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), only a handful had any voluntary involvement in the conflict. This should not suggest that they were not affected by the war. On the contrary, Quakers suffered deeply for their pacifism.

Friends' pacifist position was well-known to the Upper Canadian government. In 1792, Lieutenant Governor Simcoe encouraged Quaker settlement by promising some exemption from militia duties. In 1806, one Quaker meeting presented an official address to Lieutenant Governor Gore, assuring him of their commitment to the "welfare and prosperity of the province," while reminding him that "we cannot for conscience sake join with many of our fellow mortals . . . in taking up the sword to shed human blood."

Despite government concessions for religious testimonies, the Militia Acts of 1793 and 1794 permitted exemption from military service only on the condition that fines were paid in lieu of service. Quakers refused to pay these fines on the grounds that this action supported military activity. Those who did pay fines or engaged a substitute for their service faced discipline and possible disownment. Quakers also prohibited participating in militia roll call or military exercises, even if no fighting took place. When they refused to pay military fines, the colonial government responded by seizing their property. In the years between 1806 and 1812, Quakers paid dearly in property and goods; a number of them paid the penalty of a month in prison. While Quakers throughout the province suffered on account of their principles, Yonge Street Friends were affected most severely, no doubt the result of their proximity to the capital of York.

Most Quakers stood by their pacifist beliefs when war erupted in 1812 and very few joined the conflict voluntarily. If their horses or other goods were appropriated, Friends were expected to bear their loss willingly. Because many Quaker farmers refused government war bills as payment for grain or for billeting soldiers, they lost revenue as well as giving up property.

The peace testimony at this time was really an anti-war testimony. Any and all connections to war or war activity were forbidden. With very few exceptions, Quakers abided by these restrictions. Their settlements were still relatively new and usually set apart from other colonists. The Yonge Street settlement had just recovered from an epidemic that ravaged the community in 1809; a second unknown epidemic swept through the settlement in 1812-13. And, in 1812, David Willson led a group that broke away from the Yonge Street Friends to form the Children of Peace. The seeds of division among Quakers were sown.

The war had a devastating impact on Quakers in Upper Canada, but it was more than war that proved to be so devastating to Upper Canadian Quakers during this period. War posed not only an external threat, but it also led to internal division and disruption among the Quakers.

*Robynne Rogers Healey is Associate Professor and History Stream Coordinator (MAIH Program) at Trinity Western University in Langley, BC. She is the author of* From Quaker to Upper Canadian: Faith and Community Among Yonge Street Friends, 1801-1850 *(McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006).*

# The heritage of Ontario's forts

By Dennis Carter-Edwards

The War of 1812 marked the beginning of a fascinating history for many of Ontario's forts.

To protect strategic points throughout Upper Canada, the British poured significant resources into defending the colony from invading Americans. After the War of 1812, many of these fortifications fell into disrepair. The outbreak of rebellion in 1837, however, and subsequent border raids gave renewed life to these sites. Once again, the British poured resources into refurbishing many forts. Then, following Confederation, responsibility for these sites was transferred to the new Canadian government.

While some properties continued to serve military purposes, others found new uses. The gradual disappearance of some forts caught the attention of heritage-minded groups. In 1889, the Lundy's Lane Historical Society fought to erect a marker on the historic battlefield. Eventually, however, heritage groups shifted from simply marking sites to actively promoting their preservation. This was the case in Niagara. In 1905, the Niagara Historical Society successfully campaigned to have the government commit to preserving historic Fort George.

"A View of Amherstburg 1813," by Margaret Reynolds. Courtesy of Parks Canada, Fort Malden National Historic Site.

An even more intense battle raged over the threat to Toronto's Fort York. In 1903, the federal government sold the military reserve to the city; the city agreed to preserve the grounds and restore the site to its 1816 configuration. Contrary to the agreement, however, city officials planned for a streetcar line to run directly through the fort, demolishing several buildings along the route. Under the leadership of the Ontario Historical Society, Fort York preservationists waged a vigorous campaign to thwart these efforts.

The residents of Amherstburg were even more ambitious in their efforts to protect the remains of Fort Malden. In 1904, they petitioned the federal government to acquire the property and convert it into a national historical park. Although interested, the government had no mechanism to create such parks. The establishment of the Dominion Parks Branch in 1911 was more concerned with the management of parks and forests. But interest for a national heritage program gained momentum with the 1919 creation of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board.

The early work of this Board coincided with the disposal of surplus military property, resulting directly in the acquisition of Prescott's Fort Wellington in 1924 as a historic park. With a precedent set, the heritage group in Amherstburg renewed efforts to have Fort Malden acquired.

During the Great Depression, all governments struggled to stimulate economic growth and combat unemployment. Ontario embarked on an ambitious program to reconstruct the forts at Kingston and Niagara. These make-work projects created employment and enhanced the potential for attracting tourists from the United States. Ironically, these forts – originally built to repel American forces – were now being restored to attract American tourists.

Many compromises on historical authenticity were made in reconstructing the buildings and grounds of our forts; the philosophy of commemoration at the time emphasized accommodating the needs of the visiting public over the accuracy of reconstruction. This philosophy changed by the 1970s as the Parks Service became Parks Canada and a growing staff of historians, archaeologists and conservators supported the development of a strong national program of heritage commemoration.

As Ontario prepares to commemorate the bicentennial of the War of 1812, this rich legacy of historic forts and parks will provide a memorable experience and appreciation of this critical period in our province's history.

*Dennis Carter-Edwards is a Trent-Severn Waterway historian and archivist.*

# Forgotten by her country

by Kelly Nesbitt

"Open Doors" – Hospitable Pacifism of the Pennsylvania German Mennonites from original artwork by Canadian Artist Nicole Arnt (detail). Copies of this painting are available for purchase at canadianartcards.com

"My Dearest Jewel." Such were the words of adoration Lieutenant Maurice Nowlan wrote to his wife on what would become the final night of his life in December 1813. Despite being the eve of battle, his thoughts were only for Agatha. The next morning he was killed during the assault on Fort Niagara.

Like many, Agatha and Maurice met and married while he was in service and a war waged. Life continued to be lived, couples married and children were born. Captain William Derenzy of the 41st Regiment stationed at York married Elizabeth Selby in February of 1813; both were present at York during its invasion on April 27, 1813 – both with a part to play in the drama. For Elizabeth, entrusted by General Sheaffe, it was the task of hiding the public treasury funds.

The army attempted to limit the hardships and inconveniences during the war by sending women and children to Lower Canada. They were not always successful, however, in their attempts and exceptions were often made. A District Order from Kingston on June 7, 1813 stated that the women who did not obey an earlier order would not be permitted any "indulgences during their stay in this garrison," while those who proceeded to Montreal would "be provided with Rations and Lodging." A few days later, another order was issued requiring all women and children of the army in Upper Canada to be sent to Montreal where lodgings, fuel and rations were provided. Exceptions were allowed for women employed as nurses in the hospitals or who had obtained the special permission of their Commanding Officer. A District General Order from March 1814 sought to limit the number to three women per company "belonging to or proceeding to, the [more prestigious] Right Division."

War was not the greatest difficulty for women. The greatest difficulty was widowhood. While the Militia and Indian Department established pension systems for the widows of soldiers and officers, native warriors and chiefs during the War of 1812, the Regular Army provided pensions only for commissioned officers and their widows.

If widowed, a soldier's wife was usually limited in her options: she could remarry into the regiment, or be left destitute, unable to provide food or shelter much less passage home for her children and herself. Military widows could, and did, petition the Commander of the Forces for relief and/or a passage home. In many instances, it is impossible to discover the outcome of these lives and requests as the documents are incomplete. Some documents have "His Excellency's" decision written on them. No explanations are recorded, merely words such as "complied with for a time limited" written on the document.

Despite the difficult circumstances in which women could find themselves, there were benefits to being a soldier's wife. For those selected to accompany their husbands, they were not forced to separate from their loved one. While their lives may appear bleak and harsh in many ways, in the reality of the early 19th century, their lives were sometimes better than most. Women and children received regular food rations and, after 1812, military children had access to a mandatory education system, basic as it was – something civilian children in Canada would not share until much later. They also had access to the Army Medical Department, whose surgeons were to provide consultation and treatment for the families. Finally, in some instances, regiments took up collections to assist widows and a compassionate fund donated money to needy widows and orphaned children.

When widowed, it is easy to understand why many women chose to remarry from within their regiments. According to Subaltern Gleig, widows were "perfectly secure of obtaining as many husbands as they may choose." At Fort York, there were at least two instances of this occurring during the War of 1812 – Mary Lucas in November 1813, and Mary Porter in September 1814. For the widows of commissioned officers, life could be more difficult as they would be constrained by social conventions and unable to seek the security of another marriage as quickly.

And what of Lieutenant Nowlan's "Dearest Jewel?" Agatha eventually petitioned for assistance, having been left "totally destitute and without the means of support." In October 1815, nearly two years a widow, she asked to be placed on the pension list and, in accordance with regulations, be paid the additional amount of one year's pay as her husband had been killed in action. Apparently, the widow of a promising officer who died a hero's death was forgotten by her country.

*Kelly Nesbitt is an Administrative Coordinator at Fort York National Historic Site in Toronto.*

# Upper Canada's first parliament buildings: A place of hopes and dreams

By Ronald F. Williamson

The discovery a decade ago of archaeological remnants of the first and second parliament buildings of Upper Canada in Toronto's Old Town focused the attention of the city, province and nation on a cornerstone of Canadian history.

In 1794, Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe moved the capital of the newly established Upper Canada from Newark (Niagara-on-the-Lake) to York (Toronto). The early development of York was shaped by a plan that included land set aside for the Crown on which the parliament buildings were constructed. The first buildings, erected in 1797, consisted of two brick structures measuring 40 feet by 24 feet and situated 75 feet apart. They were likely one and a half storeys high, each with a small viewing gallery. Immediately east of the brick buildings were two 30-foot-long frame structures used for committee rooms.

The parliament buildings were used for many government and public functions beyond the sitting of the legislature (which was typically for only two months of the year). These uses included the Court of Appeal, Court of King's Bench and District Court; another notable occupant was the Anglican Church. The site also had a military presence in the form of a blockhouse, built in 1799 on a bluff less than 10 metres from the shore of Lake Ontario.

On April 27, 1813, the United States army and navy mounted a successful attack on York, occupying York for six days – looting homes, confiscating or destroying supplies, and burning various public facilities, including Government House at Fort York, the parliament buildings and the adjacent blockhouse. Among the items taken from the parliament buildings was the Assembly's ceremonial mace (the symbol of the Assembly's power). President Franklin D.

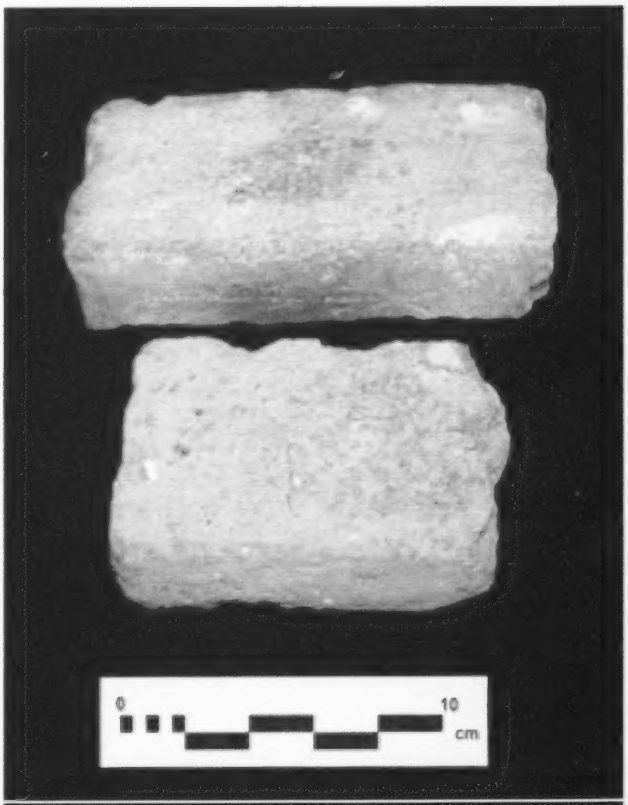
**Charred floor joists extending into the stone footing.** Mixed in with the floor complex were numerous fragments of thin, early-19th-century red brick, some of which were burnt. Other artifacts recovered from within the floor complex included mainly late-18th- and early-19th-century ceramics, some of which were also charred.

Roosevelt returned the mace to the Ontario government in 1934.

Soon after the 1813 American invasion, and while Fort York was being rebuilt, the parliament buildings, whose walls had survived the fire, were hastily repaired and were used to billet 200-300 British troops. By early 1816, the military reconstruction of the garrison was completed and the troops returned to Fort York. In June 1818, acting on the legislature's advice, instructions were given to commission plans for new government buildings. The first session in the new buildings opened in December 1820 but they, too, were destroyed by fire on December 30, 1824. The land was vacant until the late 1830s, after which time it was occupied by the District Gaol and then the Consumers' Gas Company complex. The property was redeveloped in the 1960s to include a number of light commercial enterprises.

In 2000, archaeological investigations focussed on the Consumers' Gas courtyard as it was thought to represent the best opportunity for the survival of parliamentary building remnants. In one of the excavation trenches, they discovered the dry-laid stone footing of the east wall of the south parliament building. Extending into this footing were several linear charcoal stains that had clear and distinct outlines. They were the charred remains of partial lengths of floorboards and floor sleepers or joists that had burned in place, resulting in the creation of the ghostly images of the boards. The earliest known fire on this block was the one set by Americans during the War of 1812. Not surprisingly, similar evidence for burned floor sleepers and joists was documented during excavations at Fort York on buildings that were also set alight by the Americans.

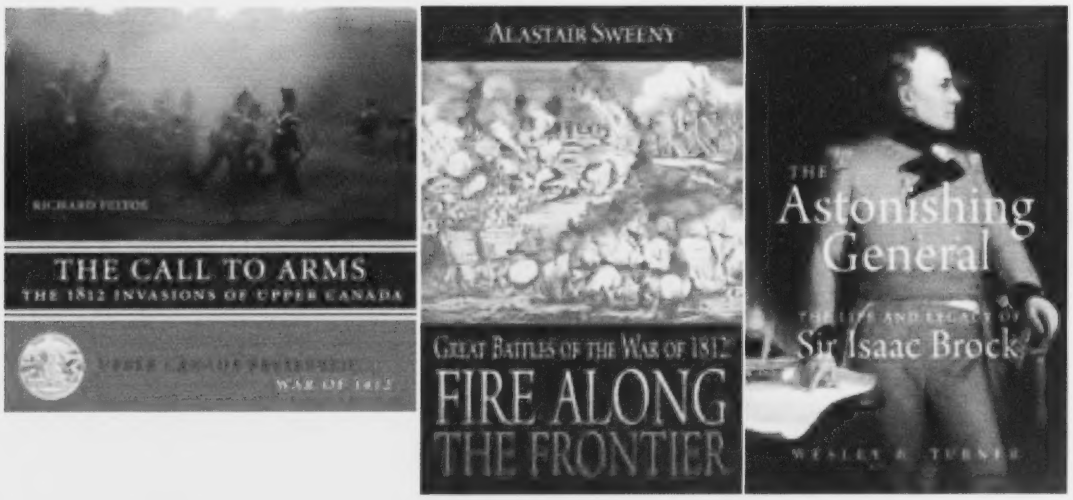
These remains are a testament to a place of hopes and dreams in a new land. The parliament buildings were among the first brick structures in the town and were referred to as Palaces – the Palaces of Government (at one time, Front Street was called Palace Street). These were buildings where decisions were made that helped to shape the province and the nation. We celebrate the work of the Ontario Heritage Trust to interpret this place and to tell the important and fascinating stories with which it is associated.




**Early bricks (note the burnt bottom one).** While it is surprising and fortuitous that archaeological remains of the parliament buildings have survived later institutional and industrial development on the block, recent work on the site has, to date, failed to uncover any additional remains of the buildings, which makes the original find all the more remarkable.

*Ronald F. Williamson is the Chief Archaeologist and Managing Partner of Archaeological Services Inc. (ASI) in Toronto – the largest archaeological consulting firm in Ontario. ASI worked with the Trust to complete an archaeological assessment of the site of the first parliament buildings in 2000.*

# Resources




**The Call to Arms: The 1812 Invasions of Upper Canada** (by Richard Feltoe), **Dundurn Press, 2012.** The Call to Arms is the first of six books in the series Upper Canada Preserved – War of 1812. Each book in this battlefield chronicle combines the best of modern historical research with extensive quotes from original official documents and personal letters to bring to life this crucial period of Canada's early history.

**Fire Along the Frontier: Great Battles of the War of 1812** (by Alastair Sweeny), **Dundurn Press, 2012.** Fire Along the Frontier is the first book that looks closely at the major battles of the War of 1812 from a business and social perspective, while also examining the political culture on both sides.

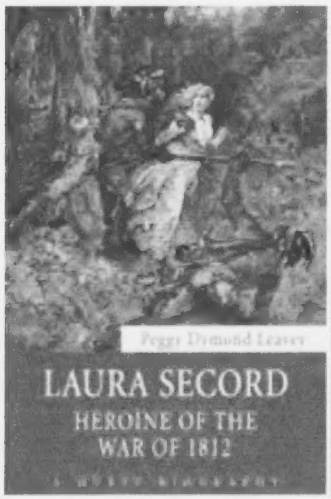
**The Astonishing General: The Life and Legacy of Sir Isaac Brock** (by Wesley B. Turner), **Dundurn Press, 2011.** This book is about Major General Sir Isaac Brock (1769-1812). It tells of his life, his career and legacy, particularly in the Canadas, and of the context within which he lived. One of the most enduring legacies of the War of 1812 on both the United States and Canadian sides was the creation of heroes and heroines. The earliest of those heroic individuals was Isaac Brock who in some ways was the most unlikely of heroes. For one thing, he was admired by his American foes almost as much as by his own people. Even more striking is how a British general whose military role in that two-and-a-half-year war lasted less than five months became the best known hero and one revered far and wide.

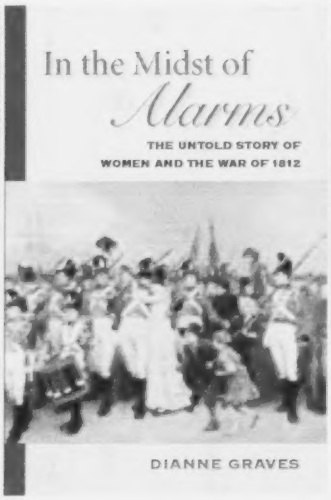
**Laura Secord: Heroine of the War of 1812** (by Peggy Dymond Leavey), **Dundurn Press, 2012.** After single-handedly dragging her injured husband off the battlefield during the War of 1812, Laura Secord (1775-1868) was forced to house American soldiers for financial support while she nursed him back to health. It was during this time that she overheard the U.S. plan to ambush British troops at Beaver Dams. Through an outstanding act of perseverance and courage in 1813, Laura walked an astonishing 30 kilometres from her home to a British outpost to warn General James FitzGibbon, [reaching him] just in time for the British to prepare and execute an ambush on American military nearby, forcing the U.S. general to surrender.

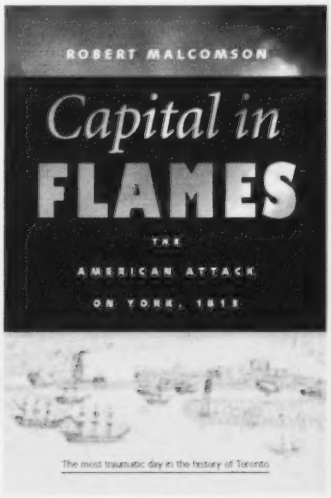
**In the Midst of Alarms: The untold story of women and the War of 1812** (by Dianne Graves), **Robin Brass Studio, 2007.** This major book by Dianne Graves brings an entirely new perspective to the War of 1812. This is a groundbreaking study of women – American, Canadian, British and aboriginal – who experienced the War of 1812.

**Capital in Flames: The American Attack on York, 1813** (by Robert Malcomson), **Robin Brass Studio, 2008.** Today's Toronto was the frontier town of York when it suffered its most traumatic day. In April 1813, warships under U.S. Commodore Isaac Chauncey landed 1,700 soldiers near today's CNE grounds and General Zebulon Pike led them into battle against British, Canadian and native defenders commanded by General Sir Roger Sheaffe. In mid-battle a mighty explosion ripped the earth open and rattled windows 40 miles away, killing or wounding nearly 300 … The town suffered a trauma few of its inhabitants would forget, and the much-criticized Sheaffe never again saw active service.

**The Journal of Major John Norton, 1816** (by Carl Frederick Klinck and John Norton), **The Champlain Publications, 2011.** The Journal of Major John Norton presents his account of a 1,000-mile journey from Upper Canada to the land of the Cherokee and his encounters with members of the Five Nations through to the end of the War of 1812. Norton (Teyoninhokarawen) was the son of a Scottish mother and a Cherokee father, and an associate of Mohawk war chief Joseph Brant (Thayendanegea).The original manuscript is contained in two notebooks in the private collection of the Duke of Northumberland.



"Major John Norton, Teyoninhokarawen, the Mohawk Chief," 1805 by Mary Ann Knight. Library and Archives Canada, 1984-119-1

# Websites

Regional:

**Algoma 1812** (www.algoma1812.ca)

**City of Toronto** (www.toronto.ca/1812)

**Niagara 1812 Bicentennial Legacy Council** (www.discover1812.com)

**Southern Georgian Bay War of 1812 Bicentennial Committee** (www.1812bicentennial.com)

**St. Lawrence War of 1812 Bicentennial Alliance** (www.celebrate1812.com)

**South West 1812 Bicentennial Commemoration** (www.1812ontario.ca)

**Western Corridor War of 1812 Bicentennial Alliance** (www.westerncorridor1812.com)

Others:

**Bicentennial of the War of 1812: The Fight for Canada – Government of Canada** (www.1812.gc.ca)

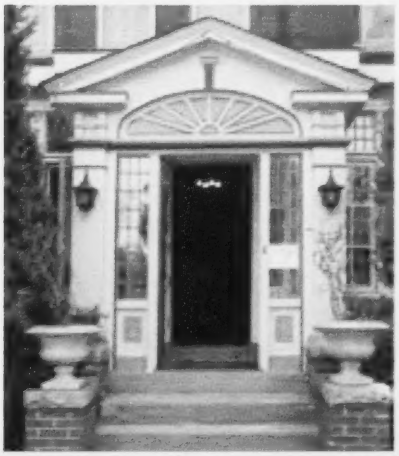
**The Maryland War of 1812 Bicentennial Commission** (http://starspangled200.org)

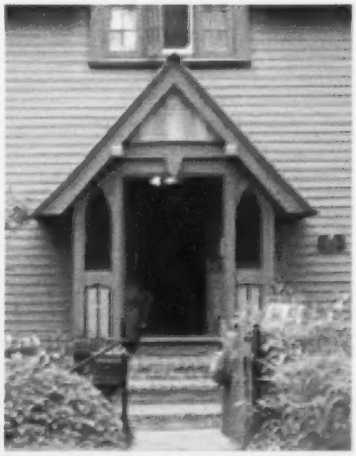
**The War of 1812 – Archives of Ontario** (www.archives.gov.on.ca/english/on-line-exhibits/1812/index.aspx)

**The War of 1812 – PBS** (www.pbs.org/wned/war-of-1812)

**War of 1812 – Historica-Dominion Institute/Royal Canadian Geographical Society/Parks Canada** (www.eighteentwelve.ca)

# DOORS OPEN ONTARIO 2012





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